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The war in Ukraine: The questions that must be asked

The deep-rooted and essential causes of a war are revealed not in how a war begins but in how it develops and to what it leads. The American Civil War was not caused by the firing on Fort Sumter. The assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand did not cause World War I.

That the Civil War was ultimately about the destruction of slavery (and the resulting unfettered growth of modern capitalism in the United States) would become clear in historical retrospect. That the assassination of Ferdinand in Sarajevo was little more than a trigger event for the eruption of long simmering interimperialist conflicts was apparent in 1914 only to the most farsighted Marxists, especially Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg.

It is now evident that the invasion of Ukraine has developed into a conflict between the US-NATO and Russia. However, in the mass of hysterical commentary on the Ukraine-Russian War, it is all but impossible to find—outside of the *World Socialist Web Site*—any attempt to place the outbreak of the conflict in a broader geopolitical and historical context.



Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg meets NATO troops at an airbase in Tallinn, Tuesday, March 1, 2022. (Leon Neal/Pool Photo via AP)

In reporting on the conflict, the distinction between journalism and propaganda has been obliterated. Everything is presented in black and white, and the media gives no space for the brain to work. According to the universal narrative, Russia invaded Ukraine because there is a monster called Putin, just as there were monsters named Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden and Slobodan Milosevic.

Learned academics—even those who have grappled for decades with the complex problem of historical causation—are in a state of intellectual collapse and are content to let CNN, MSNBC and, of course, the *New York Times*, think for them. No serious questions are posed, let alone answered.

Here are just a few questions that are not but should be asked:

- 1) What is the relation between the domestic crisis in every country (including Russia), exacerbated by the pandemic, and the eruption of war?

The media presents the war drive as if it had no connection to the dominant event of the past two years: the COVID-19 pandemic. According to an estimate by the *Economist*, the pandemic has killed 20 million people around the world. It has deeply destabilized political life in every country, nowhere more so than in the United States, leading to a desperate effort on the part of the ruling class to deflect internal tensions outward.

2) What is the relation between the wars that have been waged without stop by the United States over the last 30 years, often with NATO collaboration, and the rapidly escalating confrontation with Russia?

In 1992, the United States adopted a strategy document declaring its intention to block “the emergence of any potential future global competitor.” The Persian Gulf war of 1990-91 was followed by the war against Serbia in 1999, the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the second war against Iraq in 2003, the war against Libya in 2011 and the CIA-backed civil war in Syria.

Nowhere in the media can one find any mention of the fact, spelled out in strategic documents, that the US has been planning for years for a direct confrontation with Russia and China. Beginning in 2016, the US initiated a massive, multitrillion-dollar expansion of its nuclear arsenal, involving the creation of more usable, smaller-yield battlefield nuclear weapons. In 2018, the US left the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and began to develop and test missiles capable of hitting major Russian cities from countries in Eastern Europe.

3) Having vastly expanded NATO and moved its forces hundreds of miles eastward, does the United States view the war as an opportunity to inflict a massive defeat on Russia, leading to its eventual break-up? What is the relation of this confrontation to conflict with China?

Who would know, watching news broadcasts and reading the major newspapers, that American strategists have long dreamed of the breakup of Russia to allow direct access to the country’s natural resources? For years, major US think tanks have advocated “destabilizing the Russian regime,” and ultimately implementing a policy of regime change. Were these efforts to succeed, Russia could be transformed into a staging ground and resource hub for a world war targeting what the American ruling class considers to be its central strategic competitor: China.

4) Is Germany’s decision to triple its military budget and effectively do away with all post-World War II restraints on its armed forces nothing more than a spontaneous response to the Ukraine war? Or has the war provided Germany with a pretext for long-planned rearmament?

In a historic shift, Germany this week violated its policy of not sending weapons into conflict zones by dispatching offensive weapons to Ukraine, alongside a massive expansion of Germany's military spending. This was the consummation of a policy initiated in 2014, when President Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced at the Munich Security Conference that Germany was "too big to only comment on world politics from the sidelines." Since then, there has been a systematic effort to remilitarize Germany, involving the campaign to trivialize Nazi war crimes.

Germany is not alone. In a break with Japan's entire post-World War II history, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed that the country station US nuclear weapons on its territory. Last week, Switzerland broke hundreds of years of neutrality and initiated sanctions against Russia, a move without precedent in half a millennium.

Can one believe that these massive changes in geopolitical relations, long in the planning, are simply a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

5) What are the global corporate and financial interests that benefit from war and would profit from the breakup of Russia and unfettered access to its immense resources on the Eurasian landmass?

While denouncing the Russian oligarchs, the media does not speak of the interests that American oligarchs have in the breakup of Russia and direct access to the strategic corridor between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Russia is the world's largest supplier of natural gas, the second-largest exporter of oil, the largest exporter of wheat, the third-largest exporter of coal, and a major provider of iron, gold, platinum, aluminum, copper and diamonds, all of which are essential in all types of modern production, including critical war production.

6) How does the eruption of a conflict between Russia and NATO square with the claims that were made about the "end of history" and the triumph of peace and democracy after the dissolution of the USSR?

The eruption of this conflict has shattered the false claims that the dissolution of the USSR and the capitalist development of China would lead to a new era of peace and global

prosperity. Rather, the last three decades have been dominated by war and global conflict, in a prelude to what threatens to be a nuclear third world war.

7) But the most important question that is not being asked is: What will be the consequences if this confrontation escalates into a nuclear war? What will be left of the planet?

Amidst all the breathless coverage of the war in Ukraine, no one in the media cares to ask where this all leads. Do workers in the United States and Europe want to risk nuclear war and the destruction of humanity to defend the “sacred principle” that Ukraine should be allowed to join the NATO military alliance against Russia? Amidst all the social problems confronting the working class, is this where the line must be drawn?

None of these questions can be asked or answered because they point to the fact that the war arises out of an insoluble crisis of the world capitalist system. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, based on the reactionary nationalism of the Russian oligarchy, must be opposed by socialists and class-conscious workers. However, any analysis of the present crisis that does not place it in its broader historical and political context only serves to cover up its deeper roots.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers in Ukraine, Russia, the United States, Europe and all over the world to draw the lessons of the disaster unfolding before their eyes, and to join the struggle for the socialist transformation of society and the end of the capitalist nation-state system that is the fundamental cause of war.

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